

Reply-To: <lipman@ncbi.nlm.nih.gov>
From: "David Lipman" <lipman@ncbi.nlm.nih.gov>
To: <Harold_Varmus@nih.gov>
Subject: RE: new draft
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Harold,
Here are a few more comments.

*We hope to engage the editorial boards and publishers of existing journals, members *of scientific societies, and the entire scientific community in an international debate *that could last for several months.

Perhaps "discussion" is a better, and more optimistic word to use than debate?

*How should E-biomed be financed and managed? The NIH is prepared to provide *funds and expertise to initiate the project, but in the long run a self-sustaining *organization should be formed. Should it be supported by funding agencies? By *"submission charges" to be paid by authors? By other mechanisms?

I think coupling the funding of E-biomed to the funding of research is inherently a natural relationship. Biomedical research is itself not self-sustaining but will always depend on public funds (especially basic research). Thus virtually any other mechanism will still indirectly pull public funds and thus be subject to the inappropriate forces that pervade the current system. For example, under the current system, researchers don't directly feel the cost of their libraries' journals because that comes out of indirect costs. And thus they want the broadest range of journals regardless of their cost. Far better to make this a direct relationship - the more funds dispersed by the agencies, the more publication. The funding agencies are clearly the party that wants broadest access at lowest overall cost.

So why introduce this uncertainty? If anything, I would make the strong case for this natural relationship between funding the research and funding the means for publication.

*If a significant component of the biomedical research community can reach *agreement on these issues, we would publicize an appropriately modified proposal, *assemble the Governing Board, and assist in the development and initial operation of *the E-biomed site, perhaps as soon as a year from now.

This statement should be strong and it's not. The timeline is too pessimistic and will encourage ongoing resistance at all levels. It's always harder to stop something once it's begun. If I was given the green light and the money today, I believe we could have this ready to receive papers by September - 6 months is reasonable. I presume you will be publishing a modified version of this draft - perhaps within a few weeks? Clearly the only way you'll know if a significant component of the community can get behind this is if you've published something. Don't you really mean that if there's sufficient support, then you'll assemble the Governing Board and create E-biomed? It should be implicitly understood that you'd be proceeding on a plan modified by community input.